

## My educational journey: Who needs more education?

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2/3/2011 - **EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla.** -- My educational journey began a few years prior to me joining the U.S. Air Force in Grand Junction, Colorado. I was attending Mesa State College and majoring in the field of Geological Sciences. My overall goal was to follow in the footsteps of my father and grandfather, working for them in the family business after graduation from college. After two years of college, I was burnt out with school and wanted a change. I looked into the different branches of the military and enlisted in the Air Force in 1997.

During Basic Training -- when we received the briefing on the Montgomery G.I. Bill and had to either accept it or deny the benefit -- I proudly said, "I don't want it ... I plan to serve 20-plus years in the Air Force and have no need for any more education." I had no desire to ever go back to college for any reason. I didn't see the need for it because I figured the Air Force was going to provide me with everything I would ever need in my career. Little did I know at that time that they certainly would provide me with the tools I would need to be a successful Airman.



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As an enlisted Airman, I enjoyed the roles and responsibilities afforded to me as a Fire Fighter. I enjoyed completing my upgrade training and CDC's, which were still as close to school as I ever would want to get. It wasn't until my second duty station at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, where I would once again feel the desire to return to school. I was a senior airman with a line for staff sergeant when I arrived at Mountain Home, and during in-processing I was being shown around by an airman 1st class that was telling me about how he was going to college and how easy it was -- he planted the seed that would later manifest into my educational journey.

Shortly after arriving to Mountain Home I was informed that I would be attending Airman Leadership School. I went, hesitantly, and again told myself "this is as close as I want to come to going back to school." During ALS, the education office came down and briefed us on what they had to offer and told us the Air Force was now paying 100% of tuition costs, up to a certain amount. They also informed us about CLEP tests and the educational counseling they provide.

After graduating from ALS, I spoke to the airman who had shown me around during my in-processing, and he again told me how easy it was and what I needed to do to get started. I made an appointment with one of the educational counselors and when they had my transcripts from Mesa State they told me that I would only need six classes to complete my Community College of the Air Force Degree, which is what most career fields require after you have completed Basic Training, upgrade training, and Airman Leadership School. I then researched CLEP testing and what was required and how much it cost. I couldn't believe it when I was told that first, it was completely free, and second, you can take it while on duty. So I had I thought to myself this will cost me nothing at all besides a little time studying the CLEP manuals (again ... free) at the base library.

Armed with that knowledge, I scheduled my first CLEP test and passed it. So I scheduled another and passed it, then another, and another. I couldn't believe how easy it was and I knew at that rate I would have my CCAF in no time. My last and final requirement was speech, and my options were to either CLEP it and wait six weeks to get the results or take the class which last eight weeks. I knew then as I do now that I could always use help with my public speaking skills and opted for the class, but just this one because it was all I needed to complete my associate's degree in Fire Science.

After completing my CCAF degree, I was surprised how easy it was and realized I missed the classroom atmosphere. I was thrilled to find out that all credits from my CCAF degree were accepted toward my bachelor's degree, so I thought I might try another class to see if a bachelor's degree was something I might want to attempt. I was also able to complete a handful of classes toward my bachelor's degree before being tasked to deploy to Iraq in 2003. During those times we didn't have access to education offices or computers, so needless to say my degree was put on hold.

After returning back to Mountain Home I was notified of an assignment to Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea. I had every intention of working on my degree over there, but it just didn't happen. In May 2005, I arrived back in

the U.S. and told myself "I will finish this bachelor's degree within the next two years," and I actually did it. I even had a 130-plus day deployment to Iraq, but with my determination and the access to the internet and computers, I was able to complete the required classes.

Looking back 14 years, my attitude toward education it makes it hard to believe I am where I am today. The Air Force gave me the tools I needed to complete my degree and get back into the classroom, which gave me opportunities to excel and rise above my peers. The fact that I completed my CCAF as a staff sergeant made my supervision recognize me as someone that is studious and desires educational opportunities, which led to advanced training opportunities and that in turn led to awards that led to promotion, which led to me being accepted into Officer Training School, and now I am a 2nd lieutenant.

Whenever I get a chance, I talk to the enlisted personnel I work with and tell them how easy it is to go to school and complete their CCAF. After all, someone like me -- who turned down the G.I. Bill in 1997 -- is now halfway through a master's degree. If I can do it, surely they can as well.